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SUBJECT: KENYA - LONG RAINS FAILURE IN SOUTHEASTERN
AND COAST AREAS EXACERBATE FOOD INSECURITY

REFS: NAIROBI 1307 AND PREVIOUS

Summary

¶1. A USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) visit to Mwingi District in Kenya's Eastern Province confirms that poor performance of the 2009 long rains, rising staple food prices, and declining livestock terms of trade are significantly disrupting food security and agro-pastoralist livelihoods in the region and causing increased malnutrition. Preliminary reports indicate that southeastern and coastal districts in particular are experiencing similar drought conditions. Even if the 2009 short rains in October and November are adequate in these marginal agricultural areas, no harvest can be expected before March 2010. A joint GOK/UN/NGO long rains assessment under the Kenya Food Security Steering Group (KFSSG) will be conducted beginning July 6. An increased need for food aid, nutritional interventions and other humanitarian assistance is expected in the arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya. End summary.

SEASONAL RAIN FAILURE

¶2. On June 10, a USAID/OFDA team visited Mwingi District, Eastern Province to assess the food security situation after the poor performance of the 2009 long rains (March - May). The district received only two days of rain during this year's long rains, following the poor performance of the 2008 short (October ? November) and long rains. The team noted that river beds were dry, earthen dams that usually held water at this time of year were empty, and livestock appeared thin. Local officials reported that the distance to water sources had increased up to 20 kilometers, and

many families were migrating to other areas for food and water.

¶3. According to sub-district health workers, increased cases of malnutrition and disease in children younger than five years of age and other groups of vulnerable people were already evident on the ground and are expected to increase.

PERSISTENT DROUGHT

¶4. According to USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), all provinces experienced below average rainfall for the March to May long rains, with four of eight provinces in Kenya receiving less than 40 percent of the average rainfall typical for the season, including Coast Province, which received less than 12 percent of the average typical rainfall.

¶5. Kenya has experienced below average rains since 2004. With arid or semi-arid lands comprising 80 percent of the country, vulnerability to drought is high and resilience is eroding. The pastoral and marginal agricultural regions of the north, east and coast are the regions most affected by drought.

¶6. In the southeast and coast, farmers have been unable to harvest significant crops for three successive seasons due to widely failed rains in these areas. The Government of Kenya (GOK) Ministry of

Agriculture (MOA) reports that crops have already failed in large parts of the southeastern and coastal agricultural area, resulting in rising food prices and decreasing food security. FEWSNET reports that staple maize prices are up an average of 180 percent in markets countrywide.

¶7. The MOA is reporting that in marginal agricultural districts similar to Mwingi, many farmers chose not to plant at all, due to fears of insufficient rain, and many planted crops have already failed. In fact, the MOA has revised its crop harvest estimates down 40 percent in the Eastern Province due to the failure of the long rains. In those marginal agricultural areas, the next harvest is not expected until February or March 2010, and will be contingent on the success of the short rains in October and November 2009.

FOOD SECURITY

¶8. Food staples are available in the markets around the country, but due to below normal supplies of maize and other crops, persistent drought conditions in parts of the country, and poor purchasing power for families forced to sell livestock at low prices for cash, food staples are out of reach for many. Livestock prices decreased 4 to 25 percent in pastoral districts between April 2008 and March 2009 and FEWSNET expects additional decline due to the poor long rains and a lack of adequate grazing area due to drought.

¶9. An assistant chief in Mwingi reported that 60 families recently migrated to other regions that are receiving Kenya Red Cross food aid, or where job opportunities exist. This trend reportedly exists in other affected areas. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) reports a significant increase in families in the semi- and arid regions of Kenya selling livestock and assets at throwaway prices to purchase food.

¶10. WFP and GOK conducted a retargeting exercise in August and September 2008, which led to a decrease in the number of children covered under the regular school

feeding program. Since early 2009, at least 770,000 children are covered by the program, down from 1.2 million in 2008. The focus of the school feeding program has shifted to arid districts and the slums of

Nairobi and Mombasa. It is planned that semi-arid and marginal agricultural areas no longer covered by WFP will be covered by a GOK Home Grown School Feeding Program, which will provide cash to schools to purchase food locally. However, there have been delays in the launch due to the capacity of schools to accept funds. The WFP school feeding program ended in Mwingi district in February 2009 and the GOK Home Grown School Feeding Program has not yet been launched. If this problem persists, it may contribute to increased malnutrition in school-aged children in affected regions.

¶11. The MOA reported that the country is short 102,000 metric tons of maize in the national maize stocks necessary until the next harvest at the end of August.

Declining Health Indicators

¶12. The Kenyan Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) reports an increase in cholera cases and deaths due to water shortages in Northeastern and Eastern Province,

with cholera cases now spread to 27 districts. (This is supported by anecdotal evidence from a recent MOPH field visit, where sub-district hospital staff reported an increase in child malnutrition and diarrheal disease cases, and a significant decline in health of HIV/AIDS patients due to poor nutrition.)

¶13. The U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) Kenya nutrition officer also voiced concern that supplementary and therapeutic feeding programs in arid and semi-arid areas and marginal agricultural regions are admitting an increasing number of beneficiaries. UNICEF is seeking additional donor support to expand its supplementary and therapeutic feeding programs countrywide.

Responding to the Situation

¶14. The Kenya Food Security Steering Group's long rains assessment will begin the week of July 6, providing a more accurate and comprehensive appraisal of the likely outcome of the rains on food security and humanitarian needs. A draft report is expected in late July.

¶15. On June 19, WFP reported in a humanitarian coordination meeting that the planned increase in supply of food aid to meet the current needs is delayed due to lack of funding and limited availability of local cereals. Rations of cereals sourced from India and South Africa were cut by 30 percent to ensure sufficient supply until August. Oil and pulse rations have been cut by 33 to 45 percent, but are expected return to normal volumes following the July 7 arrival of a shipment of vegetable oil and pulses from US food stocks in Djibouti. WFP reported that USAID food donations are expected, and have recently arranged to buy 25,000 MT of maize from India that is expected to arrive in August.

¶16. In May 2009, USAID/OFDA provided 1.5 million USD to partner German Agro Action to support cash-for-work programs in Mwingi district. The district experienced almost no rainfall during the recent long rains, and the cash-for-work program will provide income to allow families to purchase food and water. USAID/OFDA has recently provided UNICEF Kenya an additional 1.2 million USD to expand its support of the MOPH and non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) in implementing feeding programs. USAID/OFDA is also reviewing NGO requests for feeding program support in Mwingi, Kajiado, and Samburu districts.

Conclusion

¶17. The failure of the 2009 long rains in southeastern and coastal regions has resulted in increased food insecurity in many districts of Kenya. Inadequate crop harvests in marginal agricultural areas, and insufficient rains for grazing resulting in poor livestock terms of trade have exacerbated the situation for residents of drought-prone pastoral and marginal agricultural areas. Food aid, feeding program support, and livelihood assistance are needed as the arid and semi-arid lands and marginal agricultural regions enter the traditional hunger gap from June to August.

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